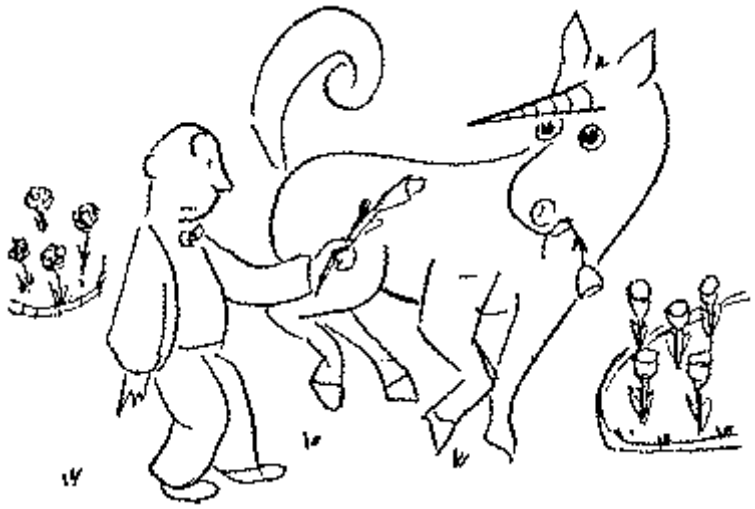
The Unicorn in the Garden



by James Thurber

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Once upon a sunny morning a man who **sat** in a breakfast nook **looked up /tap/** from his **scrambled** eggs to see a white unicorn with a golden horn quietly cropping the roses in the garden. The man **went up** to the bedroom where his wife **was** still asleep and **woke** her. "There's a unicorn in the garden," he **said**. "Eating roses." She **opened** one unfriendly eye and **looked at** him.

"The unicorn is a mythical beast," she said, and **turned** her back on him. The man **walked** slowly downstairs and out into the garden. The unicorn **was** still there; now he was browsing among the tulips. "Here, unicorn," **said** the man, and he **pulled up** a lily and **gave** it to him. The unicorn **ate** it gravely. With a high heart, because there **was** a unicorn in his garden, the man **went** upstairs and **roused** his wife again. "The unicorn," he **said**,"**ate** a lily." His wife **sat up** in bed and **looked at** him coldly. "You are a booby," she **said**, "and I am going to have you put in the booby-hatch."

The man, who **had never liked** the words "booby" and "booby-hatch," and who **liked** them even less on a shining morning when there **was** a unicorn in the garden, **thought** for a moment. "We'll see about

that," he **said**. He **walked over** to the door. "He has a golden horn in the middle of his forehead," he **told** her. Then he **went back** to the garden to watch the unicorn; but the unicorn **had gone away**. The man **sat down** among the roses and **went** to sleep.

As soon as the husband **had gone** out of the house, the wife **got up** and **dressed** as fast as she could. She **was** very excited and there was a gloat in her eye. She **telephoned** the police and she **telephoned** a psychiatrist; she **told** them to hurry to her house and bring a strait-jacket. When the police and the psychiatrist **arrived** they **sat down** in chairs and **looked at** her, with great interest.

"My husband," she **said**, "**saw** a unicorn this morning." The police **looked at** the psychiatrist and the psychiatrist **looked at** the police. "He **told** me it **ate** a lilly," she **said**. The psychiatrist **looked at** the police and the police **looked at** the psychiatrist. "He **told** me it **had** a golden horn in the middle of its forehead," she **said**. At a solemn signal from the psychiatrist, the police **leaped** from their chairs and **seized** the wife. They **had** a hard time subduing her, for she **put up** a terrific struggle, but they finally **subdued** her. Just as they **got** her into the strait-jacket, the husband **came back** into the house.

"Did you tell your wife you **saw** a unicorn?" **asked** the police. "Of course not," **said** the husband. "The unicorn is a mythical beast." "That's all I **wanted** to know," **said** the psychiatrist. "Take her away. I'm sorry, sir, but your wife is as crazy as a jaybird."

So they **took** her away, cursing and screaming, and **shut** her up in an institution. The husband **lived** happily ever after.

Moral: Don't count your boobies until they are **hatched**.

GLOSSARY

- booby: in this context, a crazy person (probably from the name of a stupid extinct bird).

- booby-hatch: a mental institution, a place where the insane are kept.
- breakfast nook: a little side room for eating breakfast.
- browsing: sampling or tasting here and there.
- "crazy as a jaybird": extremely crazy or hopelessly insane
- cropping: clipping or cutting close to the root.
- cursing: using dirty or obscene speech.
- "Don't count your boobies until they are hatched": from the American expression "Don't count your chickens before they are hatched", meaning "Don't count on things to turn out exactly as you planned them."
- gloat: a look of malice or greed.
- institution: a mental institution, an insane asylum.
- moral: in this context, the "lesson" of the story.
- mythical: relating to a myth, hence not real.
- psychiatrist: a mental doctor
- solemn: grave or serious
- strait-jacket: an armless belted jacket used to confine the violently insane
- subdue, subduing: capturing, seizing
- unicorn: a mythical beast which looks like a horse with a horn in the center of the head.

READING SELF TEST

1. What type of writing is this?

( ) exposition

( ) narrative – fiction

( ) opinion

( ) narrative – non fiction

2. Where was the man when he saw the unicorn?

( ) in the garden

( ) in his bedroom

( ) in the breakfast nook

( ) in a mental institution

3. What was the unicorn doing?

( ) eating flowers in the garden

( ) sleeping in the garden

( ) fighting with the police

( ) there really wasn't a unicorn

4. Who did he tell about the unicorn?

( ) a psychiatrist

( ) a policeman

( ) a policeman

( ) his wife

5. Did the person he told believe him?

( ) this was no unicorn

( ) yes

( ) no

( ) maybe

6. In this story, the word "booby" means…

( ) a type of bird (in the gannet family)

( ) a crazy person

( ) a bad performer (as in booby prize)

( ) a trap for the unwary

7. Which type of flowers did the unicorn NOT eat?

( ) lilies

( ) roses

( ) tulips

( ) carnations

8. The wife was NOT..

( ) solemn

( ) gloating

( ) unfriendly

( ) excited

9. In this story, what is a unicorn?

( ) a mythical beast

( ) a person with a golden horn

( ) a jaybird

( ) a booby hatch

10. There was some conflict between the wife and the man. Who turned out to be the winner?

( ) the wife

( ) the man

( ) the police

( ) no one

11. What did the wife intend to do to the man?

( ) cook him breakfast

( ) let him sleep in the garden

( ) go out to see his unicorn

( ) have him locked up in the booby hatch

12. What is the tone of the passage?

( ) angry

( ) sad

( ) confusing

( ) ironic

13. When the police and the psychiatrist were trading looks, what do you think they were thinking?

( ) that the man was crazy

( ) that the wife was crazy

( ) that they believed in the unicorn

( ) that the psychiatrist was crazy

14. Who was really crazy?

( ) the man

( ) the wife

( ) the unicorn

( ) no one

15. Why did the man live happily ever after?

( ) his wife was in the institution

( ) he had met a unicorn

( ) he had had a good sleep

( ) the unicorn is a mythical beast

16. Who lied in the story?

( ) the wife

( ) the man

( ) the psychiatrist

( ) the police

17. What features tell you that this is an updated or an "adult" version of a fable?

( ) it has mythical creatures

( ) it has characters

( ) it has a moral

( ) it uses modern expressions

18. Who is cursing and screaming?

( ) the wife

( ) the man

( ) the psychiatrist

( ) the police

19. This passage is written like a fairy tale or a fable written for children. It starts with the formula "Once upon a...(time) and ends with the statement ".....lived happily ever after." What other feature of the passage shows that it is a fable?

( ) it does not have mythical creatures

( ) it has characters

( ) it has a moral

( ) it has a psychiatrist